

Dr. Theo. Graebner's  
"Prayer Fellowship"

In the Light of Scripture and  
The Faith of Our Fathers

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## **DR. THEO. GRAEBNER'S "PRAYER FELLOWSHIP" IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS**

A pamphlet with the title "Prayer Fellowship by Th. Graebner" and coming from the presses of Concordia Publishing House has come to my desk. On the first page it bears the note: "Published by resolution of the Conference of Visitors and Delegates of the Western District of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, meeting at St. Louis, September 25, 1945." And at its very end we find as third resolution adopted by the conference: "That we ask Concordia Publishing House to publish the paper on prayer fellowship by Prof. Graebner in order to make it available to other conferences." But with this the official "Minutes of the Meeting of Visitors and Representatives of Circuits of the Western District, held at Holy Cross Hall, St. Louis, Missouri, September 25, 1945" do not seem to agree. There we read: "A motion was made and seconded that Dr. Graebner be asked to make his paper available to all brethren. The motion was carried. . . . A vote of thanks to Dr. Graebner for preparing and delivering his paper, for leading the discussion, and consenting to make his paper available. It was moved that the District pay the expense of sending the paper to Visitors and official delegates of the circuits." From this it appears that neither was the essay adopted, nor was Concordia Publishing House requested to publish it.

In considering the body of the essay we use the sectional headings used by the author to enable the reader quickly to refer to the proper page of the work discussed.

The question declared to be "basic to the current discussion of prayer fellowship" (p. 3), namely "joint prayer with the representatives of the A. L. C.", diverts the attention of the reader from the fact that all salient features of the Statement of the Forty-Four are being defended in this brochure. Our Synod is divided on the question of opening and closing intersynodical conferences with prayer. We have let local conditions and sentiment decide in each case, have held each instance to be a case of casuistry, following the faculty opinion of 1941. Now to tell us that common prayer at intersynodical conferences is the basic issue the Statement of the Forty-Four is striving to clarify, is nothing less than a hiding of the true issue, unionism.

### **Analysis of Texts Quoted Against Prayer Fellowship**

The author refers to Rom. 16, 17; 2 Cor. 6, 14ff.; Gal. 1, 6ff.; 1 Tim. 6, 3ff.; Tit. 1, 10ff.; 3, 10f.; Mt. 7, 15; 2 John 7-11 and asserts that none of the passages usually quoted against prayer

fellowship even distantly refers to such a situation, but all are entirely directed against reprobates, anti-Christian errorists, heretics, enemies of Christ, in short, infidels. But since a number of these passages are the principle passages we use to warn against unionism of every kind (Fritz, *Past Theol.*, p. 218; Walther, *Kirche und Amt.*, p. 114f.), it is manifest that the author is opening the door not only to prayer fellowship, but to complete church fellowship with those whom we cannot prove to be faithless enemies of Christ.

Here we also find the unproven assertion that the representatives of the American Lutheran Church "are coming with the intention of *eliminating* what is contrary to sound doctrine." The position taken by Dr. Reu to the end of his life (*Kirchl. Zeitschrift*, October, 1941), that he would persist in defending the old Iowa position that non-fundamental doctrines are open questions, and the position defended by Dr. Mattes of Dubuque, that the inspiration of Scripture pertains only to the doctrinal content, prove this assumption of the author to be erroneous.

And is not the author siding with Dr. Reu when he grants of no Scripture passages that they warn against non-fundamental errors, but restricts God's warnings against false doctrines to the socalled fundamental doctrines? What are Christians to do when their teachers do not obey God's order Jer. 23, 28: "He that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully?" "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," 1 Pet. 4, 11. Why was Timothy (1 Tim. 1, 3) to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine?" Are we Christians helpless when the word is fulfilled: "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them?" Acts 20, 30. Is it hallowing God's name when men make open questions of errors which are plainly contrary to Scripture, but which of themselves do not make saving faith impossible? God's Word is inviolable. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven," Mt. 5, 19.

### Relation to Erring Christians

To the question: What Scripture proof have you that religious fellowship with errorists is God's will? the author answers by pointing to 1 Cor. 3, 10-15. But the passage does not apply. Paul is there talking to his successors and urging them to build gold and silver and not wood, hay, and stubble on the foundation, Christ; for of such wood, hay, and stubble it will not hold true, "their works do follow them," but they will be burned by the fire of the Day. Not a word is said here of the *relation of the hearers* to these

teachers, good or weak, neither of severing nor of maintaining the bond of Christian fellowship. And in vain does the author appeal to Luther, Walther, and Zorn. From *L. u. W.*, 1885, 329ff., it can be shown that Luther applied 1 Cor. 3, 10-15 even to the inspired prophets when not inspired by the Spirit, but engaged in the study of the Scriptures, applied it also to himself and Link. For example he says: "*Heretics* do not simply err, but refuse to be corrected, defend their error as truth, oppose the truth apparent to them and resist their own conscience. . . . St. Augustine, however, is ready to confess any error he commits and to accept correction. For that reason he can be no heretic even when he strays from the truth. The same thing all other saints also do and cast their hay, straw, and wood from them into the fire, in order that they may remain on the saving foundation. We, too, have done and still do that." St. L., XVI, 2663f. Dr. Walther merely quotes the Apology and the theological faculty at Wittenberg approvingly to the effect that 1 Cor. 3 establishes that there are "teachers who err in one point or another without thereby ceasing to be Christians" (p. 6). But he does not say that we must pray with them since they are Christians. From Dr. Zorn's "*Wachet*" (p. 29ff.) it can be shown that Zorn did not support the position taken by the author of "Prayer Fellowship," but uses this text to open his battle against unionism. Kuegele and Kretzmann agree with the others that this text is not speaking of confirmed errorists, but of true pastors and professors adding human opinions to the revealed truth, but doing this unintentionally, unconsciously. The wood, hay, and stubble is the rationalizing that creeps into every pastor's sermonizing and is the concomitant of all human presentation of doctrine. An illustration of such stubble we have in this sentence of the author: "It is a remarkable thing?" "that the Bible nowhere in so many words condemns prayer spoken in Christian trust to the true God." Why is it remarkable that the Bible does not condemn what is right, and does not hold true of prayer with confirmed errorists?

### Prayer Not Essentially a Confessional Act

It is unethical to side-step the issue by arguing on page eight that "prayer in itself" is "not essentially a confessional act." What the author wants his readers to think is that *public* prayer is not a confessional act. Of course no one can find the element of "confession" in any Lutheran definition of prayer. Still, prayer always includes a confession. When we cry "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8, 15), we are certainly confessing to a certain relation with God. When "they stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Stephen certainly was confessing. Prayer always is an avowal of our individual beliefs and feelings. Here,

however, we are speaking of *joint* prayer. And we maintain that any joint prayer must be expression of the spiritual "communion" (p. 10) uniting those praying. Those who pray "together thereby indicate that they are of the same personal conviction in the matter of Scriptural teaching" (p. 10). "Praying in public is *teaching* in public," as Dr. Fritz correctly states, Past. Theol., p. 316. If joint prayer is nothing more than "communion of the individual participants with God," as the author contends, and not an expression of the communion of the individual participants with one another, why are the author and his friends not content with individual silent prayer?

When we deal with people who have hardened themselves in their error (p. 21), who have in spite of all correction persisted in their error (*L. u. W.*, 1868, 67, 109 f., 112), we refuse to pray with them because "prayer fellowship is church fellowship" (*L. u. w.*, 1904, 370). Of the various Committees for Doctrinal Unity, leading theologians, we expect a knowledge of the "dogmatic system professed" (p. 9), and not merely of the *milk* of the Word. Hence we correctly expect of them no "acts of common devotion and worship" (p. 3) because of their "sense" of the absence "of unity in the dogmatic system" (p. 9). "Any organization which opens and closes its meetings with so-called prayers and has religious burial rites, chaplains, etc., gives unto its organization a religious character." Fritz, Past. Theol., 224. If among other things prayers stamp an organization a religious one, then joint prayers spell unity of faith or unionism.

If joint prayers do not bespeak accord, why are they mentioned Acts 2, 42 as one of the things in which the first Christians continued steadfastly? There is no denying that the other three express the unity of the spirit. Dr. Aug. Graebner: "For this reason communion of prayer, as communion of worship generally, demands communion and unity of faith. Thus we read of the believers at Jerusalem that 'they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,' Acts 2, 42." *Theol. Quarterly*, 1899, 395. "Prerequisite of prayer fellowship and church fellowship is unity of faith." *L. u. W.*, 1904, 223. "People who join in prayer must be of *one mind, one faith, one hope*, for joint prayer is an expression of common faith. For that reason Christians cannot join in prayer with the heterodox." *Suedliche*, 1895, 97. Dr. Aug. Graebner: "Prayer has everywhere and always among all nations been a part of divine worship. . . . 1 Kgs. 18, 26. . . . And wherever heathen nations with pagan idolatry have been found, also prayer has everywhere and always been custom. . . . From the outset prayer fellowship has been common worship of God, and where common worship

cannot be practiced, Christians are not to carry on prayer fellowship. Take note of it well: with whom they were of one mind and continued in the apostles' doctrine and in the breaking of bread, with whom they were united in hearing the Word of God and in the use of the sacraments, in the use of the means of grace, with those the first Christians also continued to observe prayer fellowship. . . . Prayer is a part of the divine worship." *Nebr.*, 1903, 73f.

"The burning of incense is a symbol of prayer throughout the Scriptures." Philippi, *Glaubenslehre*, IV, 2, 340. See Ex. 30, 7.8; Lev. 16, 12.13; 1 Chron. 23, 30, etc. Ps. 141, 2: "Let my prayers be set forth before Thee as incense." Rev. 5, 8 "the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors (RV: incense), which are the prayers of the saints." Mal. 1, 11 declares the offering of incense to God a part of the New Testament worship. Prayers then are a part of public worship, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs. 8, 22-53) was a part of the public worship ("in the presence of all the congregation of Israel"). Or was it perhaps an incongruous element, out of place in this public service? From Ps. 80 and many other psalms it is evident that joint prayer was a recognized part of the public worship of Israel. Likewise, what are our hymns but joint prayers of thanksgiving and praise or petition?

At an intersynodical conference including no Missourians "one of the pastors of the other faction approached us, and, bending his head to one side, smiling blandly, and advancing with fingertips lightly pressed together, said: 'We have talked over the question of how to open the meeting, and we have concluded to ask Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ to open with a *tactful prayer*.' This meant that the prayer was to contain nothing that would offend either party. The expression of conviction was to be withheld, for the sake of harmony and good feeling. The Almighty and Omniscient One was to be addressed with the understanding (un-expressed), 'Thou, Lord, of course knowest that I would fain speak Thy truth, which I am sworn to proclaim, but, O Lord. Thou seest how tactless that would be, therefore deign to lend Thine ear to our somewhat denatured petition, lest we offend those who have departed from Thy truth.' . . . For if joint prayer signifies anything, it signifies the spiritual unity of those who pray; and if the words of Christ that we must worship 'in spirit and *in truth*' mean anything at all, they mean that our prayers must indeed be spoken with no denial, explicit or implicit, of those truths which His Spirit has taught us, and confession of which is the supreme commission of our Lord. . . . Promiscuous prayer is so evident a violation of

the Christian's innermost principle of spiritual life that the simple Lutherans of Reformation days suffered banishment, tortures, and death rather than give even a semblance of denial by compliance with the demands that they worship in forms which implied a concession to error." Dr. Th. Graebner, *Mag.*, 44, 232ff. An article in the *Lutheran Outlook*, the official organ of the American Lutheran Conference (March, 1946, pp. 70, 71), exulting over the trend of liberalism in the Missouri Synod revealed by the appearance of the Statement, closes with the prayer: "May the Spirit of God help this great body of Lutherans to see clearly the way it ought to go." We could use the identical words. But what a difference in meaning! "The way it ought to go" in *their* mind means: Cure the Missourians of their bias against unionism! In our mind it means: Lord, help us to be faithful to Thee!

Was it not unity of faith and hope that prompted the action of the disciples after the Ascension of Christ, Acts 1, 14: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren?" Did Luther in cleansing the Catholic prayers in the order of worship regard joint prayer as not "a confession of doctrine to or before men" (p. 8)? "Also at the colloquy of 1645 between Lutherans, Reformed, Catholics, and the Bohemian Brethren the Lutherans refused to join in common prayer." *Lutheraner*, 64, 111. But would such prayer not have been in accordance with the conviction of the signatories of the Statement "that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God" (Thesis VIII)? Would it not have been a prayer as defined in "Prayer Fellowship" (p. 3), namely a) "a common supplication or petition to God," b) "in common worship," c) "on the basis of a common purpose?" Refusal to pray with those who have caused divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned was the position of our Synod in 1881; for it declared: "We do not hesitate to tell anyone who teaches another doctrine among us, in spite of his appeal to the Confession of the Lutheran Church, we do not belong the one to the other; we must, therefore, walk separate ways. In saying so we do not mean to declare our opponents to be heretics, or to condemn them. We abstain from doing this even over against Evangelicals and Reformed. The import of such words is only this: 'We cannot walk together any longer. We should be unable even to *pray* one with the other. For we should in that case pray for your conversion. And you would pray to God to convert us. But such praying together were, indeed, an abomination. If you cannot believe as we believe, it is not in our power to change such

a state of things—for the gift of faith is in no man's power—but what we can, and will, and must do, is this, that we tell you, Henceforth our ways are divided.' " *Allg. Bericht*, 1881, 30f. Translation from the *St. Louis Theol. Monthly*, 1881, p. 51. Dr. Walther was present at this convention.

Evidently this refusal of prayer fellowship is some of the "legalism" of which "historic Lutheranism" intends to cure us. "The *Lutheran World* (12-15-1904) characterizes the refusal of the Missourians to practice prayer fellowship with the Ohioans 'as a reproach to our denomination, as a bit of hairsplitting legalism worthy of the scribes and rabbins.'" *L. u. W.*, 1904, 565.

### Prayer Fellowship as Distinguished From Altar and Pulpit Fellowship

As to Dr. Pieper's position on prayer fellowship Cf. *L. u. W.*, 1927, 318. The story told of Dr. Pieper (p. 9), that "he had been often an intermediary" when a General Council church in St. Louis had a vacancy and "would then send a student or a colleague to help the people out," may be an honest attempt to reproduce history from memory, but does not create the impression of reproducing the facts faultlessly. From two letters of Dr. Pieper, which were written to Rev. Aug. Burgdorf in 1889 and fortunately have been preserved, it is apparent that, while Dr. Pieper regarded it as our duty to comply with the request of a heterodox congregation to preach the Lutheran doctrine to them, he warned against anything that might appear as unionism, advised to tell the congregation at the outset that one was not acting as their pastor or vacancy pastor, to have nothing to do with the arrangement of the service or the choice of hymns, to deliver *testimonial* sermons, presenting the Lutheran doctrine objectively without strong polemics, and to make it clear to the pastor beforehand that there could be no exchange of pulpits. Finally he appended the postscript: "It is self-understood that you are *active* only while preaching, for the remainder of the time only a *spectator*, without disturbing." He also claims agreement with Dr. Walther.

Why is there no Scripture proof furnished for or against *pulpit* fellowship, either in this brochure or in "Toward Lutheran Union" (p. 172-185)? Else the author strains himself to produce Scripture proof. See pp. 6, 10. And whoever questions his argumentation is immediately met with the rejoinder: "Where's your Scripture proof? The burden of proof rests on him who," etc. The passages which the author disposes of on page four and five cannot come into consideration since he lets them pertain only to infidels.

And as to *altar* fellowship it is true, partaking of that one bread in the Sacrament gives expression to our being “one bread, one body,” is a confession of a “communion” existing between the partakers, though that is not the “communion” of which the apostle is speaking in v. 16 of 1 Cor. 10. But does this communion with one another exist only where there is partaking of this one bread? Do we not correctly teach this communion by *faith* in Christ’s body given for us and His blood shed for us as existing also between us and our unconfirmed children or our fellow-Christians in the sects? The author has not proved that we must narrow down altar fellowship below his wide joint prayer fellowship.

The only unionism of which history knows is the Prussian Union of 1817 according to the author. Hence he confines unionism to the relations between *confessional* groups and tacitly proposes that there is no such thing as unionism within a denomination. But are not unionistic practices of individuals and committees and conferences the opening door to unionism between church bodies? And must not unionism between Lutherans lead to unionism with the sects? “It (the anti-unionistic argument) is an all-inclusive principle. Any one who limits, for instance, the application of the confessional principle only to the Reformed, is neither logical in his thinking nor consistent in his practice. If I am permitted, e. g., to conduct jointly a Thanksgiving service with a Lutheran minister whom I hold to be a Christian at heart, though he is identified with a neutral or opposition body of Lutherans, then I must do the same in the case of a Methodist, Baptist, or Catholic whom I hold to be a Christian at heart. . . . I do not understand how a Lutheran can, in his relation to those who bear the *Lutheran* name, cast overboard the confessional principle and establish fellowship with those Lutherans whom he ‘believes to be Christian at heart.’ . . . That connection which a man publicly holds decides his confessional status, and nothing else. If he is a Lutheran at heart, but a brother to errorists, I cannot fellowship him without establishing the rule that it is the invisible faith in the heart which decides Christian fellowship,—a rule which would lead to utmost confusion and which would be un-Lutheran and un-Scriptural.” Th. Graebner, *Mag.*, 44, 566f. Observe that here Rom. 16, 18 (“For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly”) is correctly rejected as a standard because it is simply beyond our powers to read the heart.

### Joint Worship in the Gospels and in Acts

That the author does not want to apply Rom. 16, 17 to erring Lutherans is evident also from this section. There were in the days of Christ and the apostles no church bodies “agreeing in

the fundamentals but differing in other doctrines." We are told that our Lord and His apostles practiced fellowship with those of whom He knew that they were enemies of the truth. He prayed with them, He listened to their addresses, He occupied their pulpits, He worshipped with them. And still He cannot be accused of unionism.

I ask, Was the Old Testament Church in the days of Christ the Church of God or was it the synagogue of Satan? The Old Testament Church was organized along *ceremonial* lines by God and these the Jews had not altered. Recall the instructions as to the *Sabbath* (Ex. 20, 8-11; 31, 14-16) and how these were enforced (Numb. 15, 32-36). There was also *Circumcision*, "the inviolability of the act being such as to cause every male that had not submitted to this provision of the covenant to be cut off by an act of divine judgment or by an early death," Gen. 17, 9-14; Kretzmann, *Pop. Commentary*. And when the Jews did disregard God's precepts, Jesus on two occasions cleansed the temple, John 2, 13ff.; Luke 19, 45f. God's institution in the Old Testament was a *theocracy* and therefore differed materially from God's Church in the New Testament. Was not the Jewish Church of Jesus' day the divinely instituted *visible* Church? Did it not include all natural descendants of Abraham? Else what do we mean by the "election of Israel to be the covenant people" (Pieper, *Dogmatik*, III, 555)? Were not the promises of God addressed to this visible Jewish nation? Was not the Messiah to be *their* Christ first of all? Did the Gospel, the news of the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation, not belong first of all to this visible Church established by God? "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. . . . It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you," Acts 13, 26. 46. "Go not in the way of the Gentiles, . . . the Samaritans . . . but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," Mt. 10, 6. "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers. . . . Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you," Acts 3, 25. 26. "The promise is unto you, and to your children," Acts 2, 39. "It is the power of God unto salvation . . . to the Jew first," Rom. 1, 16. Did not Jesus as a Jew have to stay in this Church as God's institution? Did not Jesus as Messiah have to come to this Church to which He was promised? Would not Jesus have sinned if He had left the Jewish Church and organized a separate Church of His own in the days of His flesh? Jesus had to stay in this Church to furnish us a perfect keeping of the divine Law. Jesus had to bring to this Church the message: "The time is fulfilled, and the

kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel,"  
Mark 1, 15.

And did not His disciples, too, bring the Gospel of redemption in Christ to this Church until they could truly say: "Seeing ye put it from you; and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles?" Acts 13, 46.

Moreover, was there any wrong in their continuing to observe the rites and customs to which they had been accustomed throughout their life as not merely a heritage from the fathers, but as institutions and commandments once divinely given? Was "the newly established Christian Church" organized by Christ in opposition to the "Jewish Church" (p. 11) or was it to be the continuation, though in exalted form, of the Old Testament Church? Did God forbid the Old Testament worship after Christ was come or did He permit the "shadow" to die a natural death and to be replaced by the "body" which is in Christ? The only thing God forbade was "to put a yoke upon the necks of the disciples," the Gentile Christians, Acts 15, 10; Col. 2, 16.

The cry that Christ did what we refuse to do as wrong is taken over by the author of "Prayer Fellowship" from our opponents. The *Lutheran Observer* of July 8, 1904, wrote: "It was openly stated (by the Missourians) that non-church-fellowship precludes fellowship in prayer. If that be so *our Master* must have forgotten this rock-ribbed principle, for He frequently worshipped with Jews and Judas. Peter and John must have ignored it when they 'went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer,' and joined the Christ-slayers. . . . The very father of Lutheranism . . . prayed with and for . . . Melanchthon. . . . D. S. Moody and the Bishop of Rome prayed together."

### Separatism Foreign to the New Testament

By "separatism" we have always meant divisions or schisms in the Church contrary to God's will. Why does the author here not quote such simple, straight-forward passages forbidding separation as 1 Cor. 1, 10: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be *no divisions* (or schisms) among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment?" Also Rom. 12, 16; 1 Cor. 11, 16-18; 2 Cor. 13, 11; Phil. 2, 2; 1 Pet. 3, 8; Eph. 4, 1-6; Gal. 5, 26; Rom. 15, 1-6.

That all joint prayer occurs only "with such as have an imperfect understanding of the truth" has always been admitted by us. No one here below attains to anything higher than an imperfect understanding of the truth. But that it is sinful separa-

tion to refuse to pray with those who "actually maintain false views," that is, demand for their error recognition as a justified point of view, the author does not even try to prove.

There is, however, a separation *enjoined* in God's Word. "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them," Rom. 16, 17. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed," 2 John 10. After three months of vain efforts to win the Jews at Corinth, Paul "departed from them, and *separated* the disciples," Acts 19, 9. Compare also Acts 13, 46f.; 18, 6. "If a man therefore purge himself of these," 2 Tim. 2, 21, is correctly interpreted in "Toward Lutheran Union" (p. 129) to mean, "The breaking away of all fellowship with these was the first requisite, . . . the purging, the casting out of such vessels unto dishonor." Now, how can a teacher in the Church hold that I must break off Christian fellowship with a man but join him in prayer? How can any one think of asserting that the verbs "avoid them" (Rom. 16, 17), "withdraw yourselves" (2 Th. 3, 6), "avoid" (1 Tim. 4, 15), "avoid, reject" (Tit. 3, 9-11; 2 John 10f.; 1 John 4, 1.6) leave the door ajar for joint prayer? The discomfort of the author is evident from his perpetrating the sentence: "The faithful among the Corinthians were not told to separate from the adherents of Peter, of Paul, or Apollos, or Christ." What faithful were there when "every one" (1 Cor. 1, 12) was taking sides? And how does Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians because of this squabble establish that the New Testament knows of no God-pleasing separation?

### Essence and Accident

The author asserts that "the difference between joint prayer and prayer fellowship is fundamental" (p. 14, "the distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship must be upheld" (p. 31). But I must confess that I am too dense to see where he defines the two and establishes the difference. Nowhere in this treatise is the difference made clear. In "Toward Lutheran Union" (p. 169) we are told: "We begin with a *definition* of *joint prayer*. Common or joint prayer, under the conditions of visible church membership, is the prayer of two or more people holding the Christian profession, such prayer being an act of *common* devotion and worship on the basis of their common doctrinal tenets." This would seem to say that "*joint prayer*" is the thing that pleases God. Now, after adducing fourteen Scripture passages to prove this, the book goes on to say "*that prayer fellowship* is incumbent upon Christians," etc., bringing the words quoted on page

three of "Prayer Fellowship." This would seem to identify the two. But then the brochure under discussion quotes the faculty opinion of 1941 to the effect: "Nevertheless, we cannot say that under all and any circumstances a *joint* prayer with one not in confessional agreement with us is prayer *fellowship*." If this read: "A joint prayer with one not in confessional agreement with us is not always *forbidden* prayer fellowship," it would make sense, for then it would preserve the synonymity of the two terms "joint prayer" and "prayer fellowship," even though it might prove difficult to establish the Scripturalness of the point made. Every joint prayer is prayer fellowship, is an acknowledgment of a common faith in the saving blood of Christ. "Joint prayer at intersynodical conferences, asking God for His guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word" under certain circumstances may appear not to be forbidden prayer fellowship. As stated above, our Synod is divided on this question.

The question of joint prayer at intersynodical conferences is not "basic to the current discussion of prayer fellowship." What is basic in this present discussion is revealed by the author in the word: "I hold these principles to be sound and Scriptural today as I did thirty years ago when leading men in our church advocated and began to practice a policy which treated the differences between our Synod and the older (Eastern) Lutheran bodies as non-divisive of fellowship" (p. 17). Basic is the trend toward *unionism* which refuses to regard the doctrinal differences as divisive of fellowship. Basic is what underlies this practice, namely the denial of the *clarity* of Holy Scripture. Lutheranism has always stood for the principle that all doctrine as to thesis and antithesis is contained in passages so clear that our judges, the lay Christians, can stand on the *bare* Scripture, that they need no acumen of exegetes to ascertain the will of God. Now these "leading men in our Church" come along and try to rob the Christians of the clear passage Rom. 16, 17. In this passage the Christians for 19 centuries have always seen the command of the Lord to have nothing to do with men who departed in any point from the doctrine as we know it from Scripture, since such men not only cause divisions in the Church and endanger the personal faith of the Christians, but also have in view their own selfish ends. God mercifully preserve us from permitting the exegetes with their "wisdom" to darken for us those passages of Holy Writ that are a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path!

*Basic* the question of joint prayer at intersynodical conferences cou'd be called only in the sense that it is the entering wedge to split wide open our entire defense against unionism. At the outset we are told that nothing more is sought than an approval

of joint prayer at intersynodical conferences of Lutherans. But watch the child grow! Who is so blind as not to see that the principle "that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God" is all-inclusive and must lead not only to prayer fellowship, but to altar and pulpit fellowship with all and every one "who cannot be denied the name Christian?" The Statement, a defense of which this treatise "Prayer Fellowship" is, leaves no doubt in Theses IX and XI as to the range of this tidal wave.

### Dr. Fritz' Pastoral Theology

Judge for yourself what an alloiosis or substitution is practiced in this section. "Harmonizing" the author calls it. It is stated that the Scripture proof brought by Dr. Fritz has been disposed of at the beginning of this brochure. Dr. Fritz quotes Mt. 7, 15; 16, 6; Rom. 16, 17, 18; Eph. 4, 14; 1 John 4, 1; John 9-11; Gal. 1, 6-9; 1 Tim. 4, 1-7. Dr. Fritz, it is intimated, is referring to just such wolves, Pharisees, and Sadducees, who openly show disdain for the Biblical doctrine and deny the authority of the Bible, as the author would refuse to pray with. As instances of unionism Dr. Fritz mentions "pulpit and altar fellowship, union services, common church-work, merging of church bodies without doctrinal agreement, attending church services of heterodox congregations for the purpose of worship, receiving members from other denominations without assurance that they agree with us doctrinally, calling in a pastor of another denomination to baptize a child, asking heterodox Christians to be sponsors, singing and playing in the church services of the heterodox, sending children to sectarian Sunday-schools, using their church books, exchanging delegates, giving financial support, uniting with them in charitable work, joining ministers' unions, baccalaureate services, religious exercises in connection with political meetings and other meetings of civic bodies." In all this, the author of "Prayer Fellowship" says, Dr. Fritz certainly does not *intend* to set up "human authority alongside of Scripture, but *assumes* that Scripture and sound principle will in every case decide," that is, takes for granted that every case is a case of casuistry, practically an open question. This is one way of saying, I agree entirely with him who takes the opposite position from me. Thesis IX of the Statement must be upheld.

### Inconsistency of the Separatist Position

Here follows a premeditated and uncharitable attack on a sister synod, listing five false doctrines as held by it and asserting

that consistency demands the breaking off of fellowship relations by us. Who now is *separatist*? Is not this a breaking up of the Synodical conference? Our Synod has consistently followed the principle that we do not discontinue joint prayer and Christian fellowship with a disagreeing group until the break has become permanent by their stubbornly refusing all instruction or separating from us. The author reveals (p. 19-23) that to have been Dr. Walther's position.

To this day we hold that there is a difference between *discontinuing* an established fellowship and *refusing to establish* fellowship. Our Scriptural basis for this is 1 Cor. 1, 10, 11, where St. Paul calls those who were not all speaking the same thing, but beginning to separate, "brethren" and beseeches them to remove their disagreements by being "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." And are the accusations raised against the Wisconsin Synod actually true? Has there not been adjustment of some of the chief disagreements?

The author asserts that the Wisconsin Synod representatives "have met invariably with the intention of defending their position" while the other synods "come with a willingness to be instructed and with the assurance that there is an 'open mind.'" I cannot believe that the author actually holds so unrealistic a conviction. And is not this judging of hearts? Is not this making an invisible thing, the "open mind," the standard of our conduct?

Trying to make absurd the position of those who on the basis of Rom. 16, 17 insist on separation from all errorists by a reference to "our own conferences" at the conclusion of this section, proves too much. We not only pray with these brethren who have colored views regarding one or the other point of practice, but we also have pulpit and altar fellowship with them. If then our praying with them justified our praying with heterodox bodies or their members, then our pulpit and altar fellowship with our brethren would also justify pulpit and altar fellowship with the heterodox.

### The Historic Position of Our Church

This section is evidently written to support Thesis XI of the Statement, namely that "in keeping with the historic Lutheran tradition . . . such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church." But if our fathers were not infallible it must be granted that they may have done some things in the infancy of our Synod which they later corrected by refusing to do them further.

In the passages from Dr. Walther here offered in translation he is always discussing the proper behavior of the members of the Church toward individuals or groups *in their midst* who fall into a doctrinal error. Dr. Walther is talking of "breaking off" fellowship. Watch his verbs, "discontinue, deprive, severed, break off." The author of "Prayer Fellowship," however, is speaking of "granting" fellowship. Moreover, in the translation it is not clear when Dr. Walther is speaking of Christendom and when of a church body. Frequently "Church" is capitalized, while "the church militant" is not capitalized, but "a visible Church" is capitalized. Dr. Walther's emphasis on certain terms is also omitted. In addition, the author puts an interpretation on Article VII of the Augsburg Confession as speaking of the *visible* Church that is not Dr. Walther's position, as can be seen from the Proceedings of Synod of 1866, p. 50. Furthermore, the author's attempt to make the Augsburg Confession say that agreement in fundamentals suffices for fellowship among church bodies does not harmonize with the declaration of the Formula of Concord: "If otherwise there is agreement among them in *doctrine* and *all* its articles, as also in the right use of the Holy Sacraments," etc. *Trigl.*, 831, X. Dr. Walther's own action in refusing to join any of the existing Lutheran bodies and instead organizing the Missouri Synod disproves the author's contention that Dr. Walther declared unity in the fundamentals sufficient for fellowship. According to the author's position Dr. Walther was a "separatist."

Huelsemann is quoted p. 23 as saying: "With respect to the dogmas which do not involve an overthrowing of the means necessary to obtain salvation, all believers may err. . . . Toleration of non-fundamental errors and deficiencies of knowledge is part of the fellowship of love among those who, without division, are joined together in a visible Church." Dr. Walther gives this interpretation of Huelsemann's words: "From this it is manifest, we hold, that Huelsemann teaches nothing else than do we in agreement with all orthodox teachers, namely, that an error is divisive of church fellowship only if it either subverts the *dogmatic* foundation (*justification*) or, though not doing this, assails the *organic* foundation (*Scripture*) because it, though convinced from Scripture, stubbornly and *consciously* contradicts the clear Word of God." *L. u. W.*, 1868, 144f. It is evident, therefore, that Huelsemann uses "toleration" not in our conventional meaning of the recognition of the rights of a private individual to his own opinions and practices in religion, but in the sense of forbearance, long-suffering, patience, while instructing the erring. The conventional toleration the Lutheran Church insists upon as a principle of the State, not of the Church, *Pop. Symb.*, p. 12. Toleration of false

doctrine in the Church is unionism, *Pop. Symb.*, p. 106. Dr. Walther: "The fact that the Church Militant attains to no higher degree of unity than a fundamental one, does not prove that any error against God's Word may have equal *right* in the Church with the truth or be *tolerated*," Thesis X. Even our author says p. 26 that "a tolerance of error" makes a Christian prayer objectionable.

### The Later Stages of the Controversy

Dr. Bente's attitude in regard to joint prayer is excused as due to unusual provocation. But why single out Dr. Bente as the sole culprit and except the rest of our erstwhile Union Committees and the faculty of St. Louis? Moreover, we have shown above that not merely in 1904, but also in 1881 our Synod in two languages refused prayer fellowship to her antagonists.

### The Brux Case

This case is presented in such a way that the reader is left under the impression that Dr. Brux was practically exonerated and his critics censured by Synod. It was impossible to draw an exact line, or in other words, it was a case of casuistry. While it is true that Synod showed great patience and leniency toward the appellant and also endeavored to correct any financial injustice done him, it is nevertheless recorded: "Dr. Brux states that he withdraws his appeal and expresses his regret for the publication of any subjective judgments. He withdraws the charge of false doctrine against Synod. As for the essay "Prayer Fellowship," he states that he had never considered the treatise as final, but merely as a contribution to the discussion of the issue. . . . Furthermore, he states that, if there is any passage in his essay which any one is inclined to interpret as being unscriptural, he is willing to reconstruct such a statement or withdraw it entirely." All this is a retraction, even if one might wish that it be more forthright.

### The Question of Offense

In the question of offense the author, it seems, is not satisfied with the past teaching of our Synod. His position apparently is that, unless offense is *given*, that is, unless a person commits a wrong, another's assertion that nevertheless offense is *taken* ought to be disregarded. Shorter, that an actual wrong must have been committed before there can be any offense. But this does not agree with the position taken by St. Paul in Rom. 14. There Paul urges that, if some of the brethren regard the eating of the meat coming from the idolatrous sacrifices in heathen temples a sin, love was to induce the other brethren, who knew better, not to eat this meat because this exercise of their liberty might destroy the faith of the

weak brother. Paul says: "But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. . . . All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. It is good neither to eat flesh, or to drink wine, or any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Nor is the position of the author that of Jesus. When it was a question of whether Jesus ought to pay taxes, He answered in the negative, nevertheless paid the tax. Why? "Lest we should offend them." Mt. 17, 24-27.

The author grants that Scripture forbids every kind of prayer fellowship which involves any objectionable feature such as compromise of the truth or giving of *offense* (p. 23f.). A little later, however, he states: "There are simply no texts regarding *offense* to justify the use of the term in the matter under discussion" (p. 26). How can both be true?

Suppose brethren are induced to sin against their conscience by being browbeaten into joining in prayer they regard as wrong by assertions such as this: "No Christian has a right to take offense at anything which God has commanded in His Holy Word" (Statement X). Here our Synod has held that this is contrary to love and an offense. What is wrong about this position? Is it not always wrong to act contrary to one's conscience, even an erring conscience?

And to the sophistic argument, "Testimony against error is no testimony, unless it is understood," by our refusal of joint prayer we may be harming the kingdom of Christ, we answer, obedience to Christ's "Mark them, avoid them, beware of them" is our first duty; only after that do we owe those affected an explanation of our stand. If then we must suffer misunderstanding and slander, we comfort ourselves with the word: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ye ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." 1 Pet. 3, 15-17.

While the author wants to hear nothing of consideration for weak brethren in our own midst, he is solicitous about the weak in the other camps. He says: "By not doing so (explaining our correct refusal), we easily may offend weak disciples in other camps" (p. 27). A little more of such concern for our own family seems to be called for.

## **Participation in Religious Features of Civic Programs**

The St. Louis Pastoral Conference feared "grave misconstructions" by the public of a firm stand on unionism and the separation of Church and State. Christ said: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," Mt. 10, 28.

As to Dr. Caemmerer one merely wonders why, if he went half way, he didn't go all the way and, in consistency with the principles he subscribed to in the Statement of the Forty-Four, leap over all man-made walls and barriers and all ecclesiastical traditions and proclaim the name of the Triune God in a genuine benediction to this motley crowd of Christians, Jews, pagans, Turks, and Hottentots. Did he perhaps feel the Savior standing behind him and saying: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearl before swine" (Mt. 7, 6)? To us such conduct indicates a bad conscience.

It is evident, then, that the brochure "Prayer Fellowship" cannot be recommended to our pastors and people as a safe guide in the question of prayer fellowship. Would to God the esteemed author had never written a word of it!

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